

**SPECIAL SALARY RATES FOR CERTAIN HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL  
APPOINTED UNDER TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE (U.S.C.)**

**1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive re-issues policy on approving special salary rates (SSRs) for physician assistants and hybrid Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) occupations formerly contained in VHA Directive 10-94-124.

**2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This issuance contains VHA policy for authorizing or cancelling special salary rates for physician assistants appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(1) and 7405(a)(1)(A); and the following health care personnel appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) and 7405(a)(1)(B): certified or registered respiratory therapists, licensed physical therapists, licensed practical/vocational nurses, pharmacists, and occupational therapists.

**3. RELATED HANDBOOK:** VHA Handbook 5103.4, "Special Salary Rates for Certain Health Care Personnel Appointed Under Title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.)."

**4. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of Human Resources Management (051) is responsible for the contents of this Directive.

**5. RESCISSIONS:** VHA Directive 10-94-124, dated December 28, 1994, is rescinded.

**6. RECERTIFICATION:** The document is scheduled for recertification on/before the last working day of September 2006.

S/ Tom Sanders for  
Thomas L. Garthwaite, M.D.  
Under Secretary for Health

DISTRIBUTION CO: E-mailed 9/21/2001

:

FLD: VISN, MA, DO, OC, OCRO, and 200 - E-mailed  
9/21/2001



**SPECIAL SALARY RATES FOR CERTAIN HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL  
APPOINTED UNDER TITLE 38, UNITED STATES CODE (U.S.C.)**

**1. PURPOSE.** This Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Directive re-issues VHA policy on approving special salary rates (SSRs) for physician assistants appointed under Title 38 United States Code (U.S.C.) 7401(1) and 7405(a)(1)(A); and the following health care personnel appointed under 38 U.S.C. 7401(3) and 7405(a)(1)(B): certified or registered respiratory therapists, licensed physical therapists, licensed practical nurses and/or licensed vocational nurses, pharmacists, and occupational therapists.

**2. BACKGROUND:** Special salary rates may be authorized when:

a. Higher non-Federal rates of pay in the local labor market area are causing significant problems recruiting or retaining well-qualified health care personnel (see VHA Handbook 5103.4, for guidance on determining whether a recruitment or retention problem exists).

b. Recruitment or retention problems are anticipated due to higher non-Federal rates of pay in the community. For example, special rates may be appropriate when there are higher rates within the community and facility officials are unable to recruit well-qualified candidates for anticipated vacancies in hard-to-fill occupations, expect to lose employees in such occupations who are receiving bona-fide job offers, or cannot recruit for an occupation without appointments above the minimum step of the grade.

c. It is necessary, to provide basic pay in amounts competitive with, but not exceeding, pay for similar employees in the same local labor market.

**3. POLICY:** It is VHA policy that facility Directors have the authority to establish initial SSRs, adjust existing rates (upward or downward), move from above-minimum entrance rates to SSR ranges, and cancel SSRs when they are no longer appropriate.

**4. ACTION**

a. **Facility Directors.** Facility Directors are responsible for ensuring that:

(1) SSRs are needed to recruit and retain well qualified health care personnel;

(2) Appropriate consideration has been given to the use of recruitment bonuses, relocation bonuses, retention allowances, and/or appointments above the minimum step of the grade, to address staffing problems in lieu of establishing or adjusting special rates;

(3) Approved special rates comply with MP-5, Part II, Chapter 3, Section D, and the policies and procedures of this Directive and related Handbook, and

(4) Local funds are available for any increased costs before implementing special rate authorizations.

b. **Human Resources Management (HRM) Officers**

(1) HRM Officers recommend the approval of SSRs when, in their best judgment, such rates are necessary to recruit and retain well-qualified health care personnel.

(2) HRM Officers recommend the use of recruitment bonuses, relocation bonuses, retention allowances, or appointments above the minimum step of the grade, when, in their judgment, the use of these authorities would be more appropriate to address recruitment and retention problems than special rates.

(3) HRM Officers coordinate special rate authorizations with all concerned parties by:

(a) Ensuring that authorizations and cancellations of SSRs are closely coordinated with other VA facilities in the same labor market;

(b) Advising officials of other Federal medical facilities that employ personnel in the same occupation in the local labor market of impending salary surveys and notifying them of any special rate authorizations approved under this Directive. HRM Officers may release salary data to officials from other Federal medical facilities upon request to avoid duplicate surveys.

(c) Reporting special rate authorizations to the Office of Human Resources Management (051) prior to them becoming effective; and

(d) Notifying the appropriate Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Regional and Area Offices of approved authorizations.

c. **Office of Human Resources Management (051).** The Office of Human Resources Management (051) is responsible for conducting post-audit reviews of adjustments made under this directive, and advising VHA management and operating officials on special rate policy and procedures.

***NOTE:** The Under Secretary for Health, or designee, may withdraw the authority to approve SSRs if the SSRs authorized are not consistent with law and policy, or are not based on documented recruitment or retention problems.*

## 5. REFERENCES

- a. Title 38 U.S.C. 7455.
- b. MP-5, Part II, Chapter 3, Section D and its VHA Supplement.
- c. MP-5, Part I, Chapter 575, Sections A and B.
- d. VA Directives 5103.7 and 5575.3/1.
- e. VA Handbook 5575.3